



## DRESSING

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### What is it?

There are many reasons that dressing can be a challenging skill for a child. Difficulties with fine motor skills, motor planning and processing can all impact upon a child's ability to manipulate fasteners (i.e. buttons, zippers, snaps, laces) and organize getting dressed or undressed.

### How can I help the child?

The following are some strategies that may assist your child to learn the skills needed to become more independent with dressing.

### Strategies

- ☐ Allow your child to wear loose-fitting clothing (such as adjustable waist pants or sweat pants). This will allow him/her to dress and to toilet more independently throughout the day, at school or at daycare.
- ☐ Practice dressing with fasteners at home first. Once your child is able to succeed with this skill at home, then allow your child to wear these items to school.
- ☐ Encourage your child to sit down on a small chair or stool when practicing dressing skills to help with balance and stability.
- ☐ End each dressing session with a success and praise your child's efforts.
- ☐ Use demonstration, verbal cueing, and motor prompts (such as touching a hand or an elbow) to assist your child to learn the skill.
- ☐ Practice dressing dolls or toys with lots of buttons, snaps and zippers.
- ☐ Dressing in front of a mirror may be helpful for some children.
- ☐ First practice doing fasteners with the item in front of your child. Position the piece of clothing or shoe on a desk or table. Once this skill is mastered, then practice while wearing the clothing or shoe.

- ☐ Practice with large buttons first as they are easier to handle than small buttons. Adult-sized cardigans are often useful as the buttons are usually big and the buttonholes loose.
- ☐ Use a jacket with a large zipper (i.e. big zipper “teeth”). Once this is mastered, try using a smaller zipper (i.e. small “teeth”).
- ☐ Attach a ribbon or key ring to the zipper to provide something easy for your child to grab onto.
- ☐ Make up a story to help your child learn to zip up a jacket. Here is one example: “Hold the crocodile’s tail, put the food in his mouth, hold the food, and now the crocodile is full and he is going to swim away!”
- ☐ Use a visual schedule to help your child sequence the order of putting on and taking off clothing items.
- ☐ Backward Chaining: This a strategy used to help a child develop skills while ensuring a sense of achievement. With this strategy, an adult completes most of the task and the child completes the final step of the activity. As your child increases his/her skill at completing the last step, you can add the second-last step for your child to complete, and so on.

Here is an example of using backward chaining when teaching your child to button-up clothing:

- Chain 1. Start the button for your child. Once it is halfway through the buttonhole, have your child pull it through the rest of the way.
- Chain 2. Once your child is able to complete Chain 1, have your child pinch the button and pull the buttonhole edge of the shirt over the button that is just started in the hole.
- Chain 3. Finally, your child will pinch the button and start it through the hole, completing Chain 1 and Chain 2.
- Chain 4. Do up all the buttons but leave the very top one incomplete for your child to do. When your child masters buttoning, leave one more button each time for him/her to complete.